

An encounter essay



**ASSIGN
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In literally every of story of Joyce studied so far we could discover one or more epiphanies. This term is generally used as a description of any sudden moments of understanding or sense of revelation. Joyce himself once described them as “ sudden spiritual manifestations”, whether in the vulgarity of speech or gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. I will try to fathom these epiphanies and Joyce’s use of them in the following.

The story I am going to start with is “ An Encounter”, which happens to be at an early stage of Joyce’s chronological order in Dubliners – childhood. It mainly deals with a bunch of younger school boys, who live a rather sheltered childhood in catholic Dublin, reading stories about the Wild West, playing Indian fights, and having parents who go to “ eight-o’clock mass every morning”. Inspired by the stories read in their Wild West booklets, Leo Dillon, Mahony and the narrator decide to have their own little adventure and plan a day out of school, playing truant and going to see the so called Pigeon House at the other end of Dublin. However, in the next morning they are starting their journey without Leo Dillon.

Mahony freely comments: “ Come along. I knew Fatty’d funk it”. When the two boys, after a long voyage, still haven’t arrived at their destination, they agree to give up their initial plan and just to rest some time on a bench in a field. After a few calm minutes Mahony and the Narrator discover an older man approaching at the far end of the field, “ shabbily dressed” and walking “ with one hand upon his hip” and a stick in the other hand. Having arrived at the bench with the two young boys on it, he wishes a good-day and starts to talk about the weather.

Suggesting the boys that “ the happiest time of one’s life was undoubtedly one’s schoolboy days”, the bores Mahony and the narrator, who nevertheless keep silent. In the following, the old man talks, mainly to the narrator, about literature and, from there, changes the subject to “ totties”. He expresses a very liberal point of view about young people’s lives – “ Every boy, he said, has a little sweetheart”. Silence follows a long monologue of the old man about young girls and other things the speaker admits not actually to understand, which implies us that it could be about sexual allusions as the two boys are still quite young. The man stands up and walks to the near end of the field.

Arrived there, he does something that wakes Mahony’s interest: “ I say! Look what he is doing” and a bit later “ I say... He’s a queer old josser” which suggests us that the man might be, excited by two little boys, masturbating just a few meters away from them.

Some minutes later, he comes back and again starts a monologue, but it seems he has “ forgotten his recent liberalism”: In language influenced by sadism he states that school boys should be whipped and whipped again, especially if they told lies about their “ sweethearts”, he would give them “ such a whipping as no boy ever got in this world”. Calmly, the narrator departs, obviously worried by behaviour and stories of the old man, and joins Mahony who has gone away, into the field, earlier. Together they leave the place. Back to the epiphanies: the first one we can find is apparently the moment when Mahony finds the old man masturbating only a few meters off. No matter if the boys actually know what he is doing, it is definitely a so called “ sudden spiritual manifestation”: they know that what the man is

doing there is strange for them, and it abruptly changes the way they look at him. Although there is no physical threat for them at that moment, Mahony and the speaker feel worried and confused, and one of them even runs away after having seen this.

Although directly related to the old man's behaviour linked to the first epiphany, we can find another one when he is back and talking again: the way he speaks and his opinions have changed so drastically that there must be another strange awakening in the speaker's mind. We feel reminded of a definition of an epiphany mentioned earlier: It is a " sudden spiritual manifestation in the vulgarity of speech and gesture". The third and last epiphany, I suggest, might be found at the very end of the story, when the boys are just about to leave, to finish their " day off" and start the journey back home: they now realize that they have really find out what their adventure was like: they have met a sexually sick bloke instead of having an exciting day in Dublin, visiting a sight and enjoying themselves. A second example for Joyce's treatment of epiphanies could be the short story " After the Race". Unlike " An Encounter" it deals with adolescence, and tells about what happens on a particular evening in paralysed Dublin.

Four young people return to Dublin. They have just taken part in a car race, and have won the second place. The group is made up of a French man, a French-Canadian, a Hungarian and Doyle, a Dubliner. Through Doyle, Joyce shows the ambitions and aspirations of middle class Dublin.

His father was a butcher, but had been " fortunate enough to secure some police contracts" and had become rich enough to be referred to as the "

merchant prince". The father has plans for his son – Doyle is first sent to Cambridge, to study, where he first encounters international upper class lifestyle, not the one he knows from Dublin. Studies do not particularly interest him, and he returns to Dublin. Doyle could be called a typical rich son, and he is highly interested in music and motoring. He got to know a member of the racing team, and is now elated to be entering Dublin in the team's company. That evening's Dinner is a matter that causes great excitement in Doyle's family, as it shows father and mother that " their son has arrived" – arrived in the world of jet-set and international playboys, as they think.

However, Joyce doesn't reject to admit that Dublin wasn't actually a metropolis as it seemed to be then: " That night the city wore the mask of a capital". The company of the young men is heady. They talk loudly and gaily. And when they stroll along " Stephen's Green", people on the road make way for them. I think Joyce wants to imply here how much the odour of wealth and internationality are worshipped in Dublin – another allusion on the paralysis he finds in Dublin in those times. They team makes its way to a yacht, where the go on celebrating themselves happily.

The party continues with game where money is staked – Doyle loses heavily, " but who cares on such a night"? The party ends up with the Hungarian, who unlike Doyle realized that this isn't his world, retired from the game, announcing " Daybreak, gentlemen! " In this story, we find another way of use of epiphanies: Joyce keeps it until the very end until he uses the epiphany with the Hungarian reminding the team that it is time to wake up and face the realities of a normal day. This shows Doyle that the last twelve

hours were just an illusion and that he can't actually cope with the standard of these international "jet-setters". He has lost far more money than he can afford and has to realize that he is just a Dubliner – and that Dublin hasn't got its place in a line-up of the international capitals. Joyce's use of the epiphany is remarkable, as it wasn't to the very end of the story that he effectively used it. For the whole time, Joyce left Jimmy Doyle and us in the imagination that the Dubliner could actually cope with his colleagues until he abruptly drops him out of his dream world.

So far we could discover quite a different use of epiphanies in two of Joyce's stories: used three times in "An Encounter", opening different point of views for the boys of the day and of the old man, Joyce uses, in contrast, only one epiphany in "After the Race", which in itself, however, is much sharper and more abrupt. While in "After the race" the epiphany is used at the very end only, they are spread wider in "An Encounter". Both stories' epiphanies have in common that they actually always are memorable phases of the persons minds themselves, or in Joyce's words, these "sudden spiritual manifestations" I mentioned before.